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THE NEW YORK TIMES
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Letters

From Reagan to C.I.A., to Treat With Care

To the Editor:

Your Dec. 9 editorial "Looser Reins for the C.I.A." asks whether the Central Intelligence Agency will once again spy on Americans. You term President Reagan's new executive order governing intelligence agencies "not reassuring."

One major uncertainty in the order — new authority for clandestine collection in the United States of "significant foreign intelligence" about Americans — is troubling. Executive orders are as much a restriction on Presidents as they are on agencies like the C.I.A., one reason Presidents Ford and Carter established public restrictions on intrusive intelligence activities. Only follow-on procedures — public ones, it is hoped — will tell for sure.

There is some cause for cautious optimism, however. It is clear to me that the President — and those who advised him to sign the new order — are aware of the uncertainties they have created. This Administration listened carefully to the Congressional oversight committees in fashioning its approach to intelligence regulation.

The final product, aside from the troubling question of what "significant" will come to mean, is no appreciable departure from the Carter order. What is new is the stamp of approval the President has placed on the intelligence function.

I do not quarrel with the President's desire for a more effective intelligence community. As long as this Administration recognizes that it is the attitudes, intentions and activities of foreign powers that the C.I.A. should investigate, intelligence activities should pose fewer threats to civil liberties.

The President has signed a respectable executive order. The intelligence chiefs should insure that the all-important implementing procedures reflect similarly cautious judgment.

(Rep.) EDWARD P. BOLAND
Chairman, House Permanent
Select Committee on Intelligence
Washington, Dec. 15, 1981

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